SECULAR AUTHORITY

To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed

Martin Luther

EDITED BY
Nate Hoover

Apocalypse Press

INTRODUCTION

1523

LUTHER faced a condition, not simply a theory. He faced the theory of the temporal power of the Church. He faced also the fact. He had protested against the one and defied the other at Worms. Now matters were to be put to the test. The diet had put Luther under the ban of the empire. The Council of Regency, by edict of January 20, 1522, demanded that severe measures be taken to carry out the edict of Worms. It gave assurance of temporal aid. It was now over a year since Luther's books had been burned. In the Netherlands adherents of Luther had lately been imprisoned and threatened with death. Only that fall, after the appearance of his translation of the New Testament, the Dukes of Bavaria, the Elector of Brandenburg, and Duke George of Saxony issued

strict orders against the sale and use of the book. Luther knew that the princes were plotting against his life. How should a Christian conduct himself toward such rulers and their power? This set Luther thinking on the questions involved in our treatise. Again, during his absence at the Wartburg the question had arisen in Wittenberg concerning the interpretation of passages like Matthew 5:39, and Romans 12:19. The Roman Catholic interpretation was that these are counsels for the perfect, not precepts for all Christians. His answer to Melanchthon from the Wartburg was that the Gospel had nothing to do with the power of the sword, that secular authority was not necessary if all were Christians but that it must be maintained because of sin. Whence then is the Church's secular authority? In the Open Letter to the Christian Nobility he had denied this authority and had there defined the separate and distinct spheres of Church and State.

It was necessary to reaffirm what he had said then, and also to maintain the divine character of the State against the fanatics who forbade civil offices to Christians.

The basis of our treatise is to be found in the third and fourth of the six sermons preached October 19, 24, 25, and 26, 1522, at Weimar, in the presence of Duke John of Saxony. At the request of the court preacher, Wolfgang Stein, Duke John, and others, Luther undertook the publication of the material. He could not commence the

work before the middle of December. Duke George's order against the sale of Luther's New Testament, dated November 7, 1522, may have hastened Luther's efforts. The material grew under his pen into our treatise, dedicated to Duke John and dated New Year's Day, 1523. By New Year Luther undoubtedly means Christmas, as he does in his Christmas hymn, "Vom Himmel hoch." The date of the treatise, then, is December 25, 1522. It did not appear, however, until March, 1523, for Duke George complains of it to Elector Frederick on March 21st of that year.

The treatise is divided into three parts. In the first part Luther shows, as he had in the Open Letter to the Christian Nobility, that secular authority is ordained of God. Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount are binding on all Christians and refer to personal revenge. They do not forbid even Christians to bear the sword for the sake of others and to curb wickedness. Like the oath, the sword is not needed among Christians.

The main line of discussion is contained in the second part. This takes up the question, in how far secular authority should be obeyed. Its sphere is the kingdom of the world over against the kingdom of God. It is not to invade the latter sphere. Faith is a matter of the individual conscience. God alone bears rule over the soul. God is to be obeyed rather than man. Bishops rule by applying God's Word. Christians are to be ruled by nothing but God's Word.

In the third part are found the remnants of the sermon preached at Weimar. Here Luther instructs the princes how to conduct themselves toward God, toward their subjects, toward their counselors, and toward evil doers. He speaks as the father confessor of the prince.

Our treatise is of political as well as religious significance. It maintains the right of private judgment over against Church and State. It is the first ethical defense of government over against the current Roman Catholic conception, which traced all authority to the Church. It gave the world a new theory of the State, separated State from Church, and made the function of the State the service of its people.

[Original Publisher's Introduction, 1930]

LETTER OF DEDICATION

To the Illustrious, High-born Prince and Lord, John, Duke of Saxony, Landgrave of Thuringia, Margrave of Meissen, My Gracious Lord. Grace and peace in Christ. Again, illustrious, high-born prince, gracious lord, necessity is laid upon me, and the entreaties of many, and above all your grace's wishes impel me, to write concerning the secular authorities and the sword they bear; how it should be used in a Christian manner and in how far men are bound to obey it. For men are perplexed by the word of Christ in Matthew 5:39, "Thou shalt not resist evil, but agree with thine adversary; and if any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also," and Romans 12:19, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord." These very texts Prince Volusian of old quoted against Saint Augustine, 1 and charged Christianity with permitting the wicked to do evil

and with being incompatible with the power of the sword.

The sophists in the universities also were perplexed by these texts, because they could not reconcile the two spheres. In order not to make heathen of the princes, they taught that these sayings of Christ are not precepts but counsels of perfection. Thus Christ had to become a liar and be in error, in order that the princes might continue in honor. For they could not exalt the princes without putting down Christ, —wretched blind sophists that they are. And thus their poisonous error has spread through the whole world, so that every one regards these teachings of Christ as counsels of perfection, and not as precepts binding on all Christians alike. It has gone so far that they have permitted the imperfect duty of the sword and of secular authority not only to the perfect class of bishops, but even to the pope, whose rank is the most perfect of all; nay, they have ascribed it to no one on earth so completely as to him. So thoroughly has the devil taken possession of the sophists and of the universities, that they themselves do not know what and how they speak or teach.

I hope, however, to instruct the princes and the secular authorities in such a way that they shall remain Christians and that Christ shall remain Lord, yet so that Christ's commandments need not for their sake be changed into counsels. This will I do as a dutiful service to your princely grace, for the profiting of every one who may need it, and to the

praise and glory of Christ our Lord. I commend your princely grace with all your kin to the grace of God. May He mercifully have you in His keeping. Amen.

Your Princely Grace's obedient servant,
Martin Luther.
Wittenberg,
New Year's Day, 3 1523.

PART I: THE TREATISE

Formerly I addressed a booklet to the German nobility, setting forth their Christian office and functions. But how they have carried out my suggestions is very plain to see. Hence I must change my tactics and write them, this time, what they should omit and not do. I fear this writing will have just as little effect on them as the former one had,—they will by all means remain princes and by no means become Christians. For God Almighty has made our rulers mad. They actually think they have the power to do and command their subjects to do, whatever they please. And the subjects are led astray and believe they are bound to obey them in everything. It has gone so far that the rulers have ordered the people to put away books, and to believe and keep what they prescribe. In this way they presumptuously set themselves in God's

place, lord it over men's conscience and faith, and put the Holy Spirit to school according to their mad brains. They let it be known, at the same time, that they are not to be contradicted, but called gracious lords into the bargain. They issue public proclamations, saying that this is the emperor's command and they desire to be Christian and obedient princes, as though they were in earnest about it and one did not see the knave behind the mask. If the emperor took a castle or a city from them or commanded some other injustice, we should see how quickly they would find themselves obliged to resist the emperor and disobey him. But when it comes to fleecing the poor and to doing what they please with God's Word, it must be called obedience to the imperial command. Such people were formerly called knaves, now they must be addressed as Christian and loyal princes. Yet they will not permit any one to appear before them for a hearing or to defend himself, no matter how humbly he may petition. If the emperor or any one else should do the same to them they would regard it as most intolerable. These are the princes who rule the empire in German lands today; hence also there must needs be such prosperity in all lands, as we see.

Because the raving of such fools tends to the suppression of Christian faith, the denying of the divine Word, and the blaspheming of the divine Majesty, I can and will no longer look upon my ungracious lords and angry nobles, but must re-

sist them at least with words. And since I have not been in terror of their idol, the pope, who threatens to deprive me of soul and of heaven, I must show that I am not in terror of his scales and bubbles which threaten to deprive me of body and of earth. God grant that they may have to rage until grey habits perish, and that we die not of their threatenings. Amen.

I. Secular Authority is of God

We must firmly establish secular law and the sword, that no one may doubt that it is in the world by God's will and ordinance. The passages which establish this are the following: Romans 13:1, "Let every soul be subject to power and authority, for there is no power but from God. The power that is everywhere is ordained of God. He then who resists the power resists God's ordinance. But he who resists God's ordinance shall bring himself under condemnation." Likewise, 1 Peter 2:13, "Be subject to every kind of human ordinance, whether to the king as supreme, or to the governors, as to those sent of Him for the punishing of the evil and for the reward of the good." This penal law existed from the beginning of the world. Genesis 4:14. For when Cain slew his brother he was in such great terror of being in turn killed that God specially forbade it and sus-

pended the sword for his sake,—and no one was to slay him. He would not have had this fear if he had not seen and heard from Adam that murderers should be slain. Moreover God re-established and confirmed it after the Flood in unmistakable terms when He said, Genesis 9:6, "Whoso sheds man's blood, his blood shall be shed again by man." This cannot be understood as a plague and punishment of God upon murderers; for many murderers who repent or are pardoned continue to live, and die by other means than the sword. But it is said of the right of the sword, that a murderer is guilty of death and should in justice be slain by the sword. Though justice be hindered or the sword be tardy, so that the murderer dies a natural death, the Scripture is not on that account false when it says, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." For it is men's fault or merit that this law commanded of God is not carried out; even as other commandments of God are broken.

Afterward it was also confirmed by the law of Moses, Exodus 21:14, "If a man presumptuously kill thou shalt take him from My altar that he may die." And again, in the Exodus 21:23, same place, "A life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a foot for a foot, a hand for a hand, a wound for a wound, a bruise for a bruise." Christ also confirms it Matthew 26:52 when He says to Peter in the garden, "He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword," which is to be inter-

preted like Genesis ix, "Whoso sheddeth man's blood," etc. Doubtless Christ refers in these words to that passage and incorporates and confirms it in them. John the Baptist teaches the same. When the soldiers asked him what they should Luke 3:14 do, he answered, "Do injustice or violence to no one, and be content with your wages." If the sword were not divinely appointed he should have commanded them to cease being soldiers, since he was to perfect the people and direct them in a proper Christian way. Hence it is sufficiently clear and certain that it is God's will that the sword and secular law be used for the punishment of the 1 Peter 2:14 wicked and the protection of the upright.

II. Non-resistance

There seems to be a powerful argument on the other side. Christ says, Matthew 5:38, "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. But I say unto you, That a man shall not resist evil, but if any one strikes thee upon the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and whoever will go to law with thee to take thy coat, let him have the cloak also, and whoever forces thee a mile, with him go two miles." Likewise Paul, Rom. 12:19, "Dearly beloved, defend not yourselves, but give place to

God's wrath, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay saith the Lord." Likewise Matthew 5:44, "Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you." And 1 Peter 3:9, "Let no one repay evil with evil, nor railing with railing," etc. These and the like passages truly would make it appear as though in the New Testament there should be no secular sword among Christians. Hence the sophists also say that Christ has abolished Moses' law; of such commandments they make counsels for the perfect, and divide Christian teaching and Christians into two classes. One part they call the perfect, and assign to it such counsels. To the other, the imperfect, they assign the commandments. This they do out of sheer perversity and caprice without any scriptural basis. They do not see that in the same passage Christ lays such stress on His teaching that He is unwilling to have the least word of it set aside and condemns to hell those who do not love their enemies. Therefore we must interpret these passages differently, so that Christ's words may apply to all alike whether they be "perfect" or "imperfect." For perfection and imperfection consist not in works and do not establish a distinct external order among Christians; but they exist in the heart, in faith and love, so that they who believe and love the most are the perfect ones, whether outwardly they be male or female, prince or peasant, monk or layman. For love and faith produce no sects or outward differences.

III. The Two Kingdoms

We must divide all the children of Adam into two classes; the first belong to the kingdom of God, the second to the kingdom of the world. Those belonging to the kingdom of God are all true believers in Christ and are subject to Christ. For Christ is the King and Lord in Psalm 2:6 the kingdom of God, as the second Psalm and all the Scriptures say. For this reason He came into the world, that He might begin God's kingdom and establish it in John 18:36 the world. Therefore He says before Pilate, "My kingdom is not of the world, but whoever is of the truth hears My voice"; and continually in the Gospel He refers to the kingdom of God and says, "Amend your ways, the kingdom of God is at hand." Likewise, "Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness." He also calls the Gospel, a Gospel of the kingdom, for the reason that it teaches, governs, and contains God's kingdom.

Christians Need No Law

Now observe, these people need no secular sword or law. And if all the world were composed of real Christians, that is, true believers, no prince, king, lord, sword, or law would be needed. For what were the use of them, since Christians have in

their hearts the Holy Spirit, who instructs them and causes them to wrong no one, to love every one, willingly and cheerfully to suffer injustice and even death from every one. Where every wrong is suffered and every right is done, no quarrel, strife, trial, judge, penalty, law or sword is needed. Therefore, it is not possible for the secular sword and law to find any work to do among Christians, since of themselves they do much more than its laws and doctrines can demand. Just as Paul says in 1 Tim. 1:9, "The law is not given for the righteous, but for the unrighteous."

Why is this? Because the righteous does of himself all and more than all that all the laws demand. But the unrighteous do nothing that the law demands, therefore they need the law to instruct, constrain, and compel them to do what is good. A good tree does not need any teaching or law to bear good fruit, its nature causes it to bear according to its kind without any law and teaching. A man would be a fool to make a book of laws and statutes telling an apple tree how to bear apples and not thorns, when it is able by its own nature to do this better than man with all his books can define and direct. Just so, by the Spirit and by faith all Christians are throughout inclined to do well and keep the law, much more than any one can teach them with all the laws, and need so far as they are concerned no commandments nor law.

You ask, Why then did God give to all men so

many commandments, and why did Christ teach in the Gospel so many things to be done? Concerning this I have written much in the Postil and elsewhere. To put it as briefly as possible here, Paul says that the law is given for the sake of the unrighteous, that is, that those who are not Christians may through the law be externally restrained from evil deeds, as we shall hear later. Since, however, no one is by nature Christian or pious, but every one sinful and evil, God places the restraints of the law upon them all, so that they may not dare give rein to their desires and commit outward, wicked deeds. In addition, St. Paul gives the law another function in Romans 7; Gal. 3:10, 24. It is to teach men to recognize sin, so that they may be made humble unto grace and unto faith in Christ. Christ also does this here, when He teaches in Matthew 5:39 that we should not resist evil, and thereby glorifies the law and teaches how a real Christian ought to be and must be disposed, as we shall hear further on.

IV. Non-Christians Under the Law

All who are not Christians belong to the kingdom of the world and are under the law. Since few believe and still fewer live a Christian life, do not resist the evil, and themselves do no

evil, God has provided for non-Christians a different government outside the Christian estate and God's kingdom, and has subjected them to the sword, so that, even though they would do so, they cannot practice their wickedness, and that, if they do, they may not do it without fear nor in peace and prosperity. Even so a wild, savage beast is fastened with chains and bands, so that it cannot bite and tear as is its wont, although it gladly would do so; whereas a tame and gentle beast does not require this, but without any chains and bands is nevertheless harmless. If it were not so, seeing that the whole world is evil and that among thousands there is scarcely one true Christian, men would devour one another, and no one could preserve wife and child, support himself and serve God; and thus the world would be reduced to chaos. For this reason God has ordained...

Spiritual and Secular Government

...the two governments; the spiritual which by the Holy Spirit under Christ makes Christians and pious people, and the secular, which restrains the unchristian and wicked so that they must needs keep the peace outwardly, even against their will. So Paul interprets the secular sword, Rom. 13:3 and says it is not a terror to good works, but to

the evil. And Peter says it is for the punishment of evil doers.

Secular Government Indispensable

If any one attempted to rule the world by the Gospel, and put aside all secular law and the secular sword, on the plea that all are baptized and Christian, and that according to the Gospel, there is to be among them neither law nor sword, nor necessity for either, pray, what would happen? He would loose the bands and chains of the wild and savage beasts, and let them tear and mangle every one, and at the same time say they were quite tame and gentle creatures; but I would have the proof in my wounds. Just so would the wicked under the name of Christian abuse this freedom of the Gospel, carry on their knavery, and say that they were Christians subject neither to law nor sword, as some 1 are already raving and ranting. To such a one we must say, It is indeed true that Christians, so far as they themselves are concerned, are subject to neither law nor sword and need neither; but first take heed and fill the world with real Christians before ruling it in a Christian and evangelical manner. This you will never accomplish; for the world and the masses are and always will be unchristian, although they are all baptized and are nominally Christian. Christians,

however, are few and far between, as the saying is. Therefore it is out of the question that there should be a common Christian government over the whole world, nay even over one land or company of people, since the wicked always outnumber the good. Hence a man who would venture to govern an entire country or the world with the Gospel would be like a shepherd who should place in one fold wolves, lions, eagles, and sheep together and let them freely mingle with one another and say, Help yourselves, and be good and peaceful among yourselves; the fold is open, there is plenty of food; have no fear of dogs and clubs. The sheep, forsooth, would keep the peace and would allow themselves to be fed and governed in peace, but they would not live long; nor would any beast keep from molesting another.

For this reason these two kingdoms must be sharply distinguished, and both be permitted to remain; the one to produce piety, the other to bring about external peace and prevent evil deeds; neither is sufficient in the world without the other. For no one can become pious before God by means of the secular government, without Christ's spiritual rule. Hence Christ's rule does not extend over all, but Christians are always in the minority and are in the midst of non-Christians. Where there is only secular rule or law, there, of necessity, is sheer hypocrisy, though the commandments be God's very own. Without the Holy Spirit in the heart no one becomes really

pious, he may do as fine works as he will. Where, on the other hand, the spiritual government rules alone over land and people, there evil is given free rein and the door is opened for every kind of knavery; for the natural world cannot receive or comprehend spiritual things.

Christians Not to Use Secular Law Among Themselves

You see the purpose of Christ's words which we quoted above from Matthew 5:39. They mean that Christians shall not go to law nor use the secular sword among themselves. In reality He says it only to His dear Christians. They alone also accept it and act accordingly, nor do they make counsels of it, as the sophists do, but are so inclined in their heart, through the Spirit, that they do evil to no one and willingly endure evil at every one's hands. If the whole world were Christian, all these words would apply to it and it would keep them. Since, however, it is unchristian the words do not apply to it, nor does it keep them, but is under another rule in which those who are not Christians are under external constraint and are forced to keep the peace and do what is good.

For this reason Christ did not wield the sword nor give it a place in His kingdom; for He is a King over Christians and rules by His Holy Spirit alone, without law. And although He ac-

knowledged the sword, He nevertheless did not use it; for it is of no use in His kingdom, in which are none but the pious. Hence David of old dared not build the temple, because he had shed much blood and had borne the sword; not that he had done wrong thereby, but because he could not be a type of Christ, who without the sword was to have a kingdom of peace. It must be built by Solomon, whose name means "Frederick" or "peaceful," who had a peaceful kingdom, by which the truly peaceful kingdom of Christ, the real Frederick and Solomon, could be represented. In like manner, during the entire building of the temple not the sound of a tool was heard, as the text says; all for this reason, that Christ, without constraint and force, without law and the sword, was to have a people who serve Him freely.

This is what the prophets mean in Psalm 110:3, "Thy people shall be willing"; and in Isa. 11:9, "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain"; and in Isa. 2:4, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and no one shall lift up the sword against another, neither shall they busy themselves in war anymore," etc. Whoever would apply these and similar passages wherever Christ's name is professed, would entirely pervert the Scriptures; for they are spoken only of true Christians, who really do this among themselves.

V. Christians Subject to Secular Authority in Love

But perhaps you will say, Since Christians do not need the secular sword and the law, why does Paul say to all Christians in Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13, "Let all souls be subject to power and authority"? And St. Peter says, "Be subject to every human ordinance," etc., as quoted above. I answer, as I have said, that Christians, among themselves and by and for themselves, need no law or sword, since it is neither necessary nor profitable for them. Since, however, a true Christian lives and labors on earth not for himself, but for his neighbor, therefore the whole spirit of his life impels him to do even that which he need not do, but which is profitable and necessary for his neighbor. Because the sword is a very great benefit and necessary to the whole world, to preserve peace, to punish sin and to prevent evil, he submits most willingly to the rule of the sword, pays tax, honors those in authority, serves, helps, and does all he can to further the government, that it may be sustained and held in honor and fear. Although he needs none of these things for himself and it is not necessary for him to do them, yet he considers what is for the good and profit of others, as Paul teaches in Eph. 5:21. He serves the State as he performs all other works of love,

which he himself does not need. He visits the sick, not that he may be made well; feeds no one because he himself needs food: so he also serves the State not because he needs it, but because others need it,—that they may be protected and that the wicked may not become worse. He loses nothing by this, and such service in no way harms him, and yet it is of great profit to the world. If he did not do it, he would be acting not as a Christian but contrary even to love, and would also be setting a bad example to others, who like him would not submit to authority, though they were no Christians. In this way the Gospel would be brought into disrepute, as though it taught rebellion and made self-willed people, unwilling to benefit or serve any one, when in reality it makes a Christian the servant of every one. Thus in Matthew 17:27, Christ gave the tribute money that He might not offend them, although He did not need to do it.

Thus you observe in the words of Christ quoted above from Matt. 5:39 that He indeed teaches that Christians among themselves should have no secular sword nor law. He does not, however, forbid one to serve and obey those who have the secular sword and the law; much rather, since you have no need of them and are not to have them, are you to serve those who have not progressed so far as you and still need them. Although you do not need to have your enemy punished, your weak neighbor does. You should

help him, that he may have peace and that his enemy may be curbed; which is not possible unless power and authority are honored and feared. Christ does not say, "Thou shalt not serve the State or be subject to it," but "Thou shalt not resist evil." As though He said, "Take heed that you bear everything, so that you may not need the State to help and serve you and be of profit to you, but that you may on the other hand, help, serve, and be of profit and use to it. I would have you to be far too exalted and noble to have any need of it, but it should have need of you."

VI. Christian Bear the Sword?

You ask whether a Christian, also, may bear the secular sword and punish the wicked, since Christ's words, "Thou shalt not resist the evil," are so clear and definite that the sophists have had to make a counsel of them. I answer, You have now heard two propositions. The one is, that the sword can have no place among Christians, therefore you cannot bear it among and against Christians, who do not need it. The question, therefore, must be directed to the other side, to the non-Christians, whether as a Christian you may there bear it. Here the other proposition applies, that you are under obligation to serve and further the sword by whatever means you can,

with body, soul, honor or goods. For it is nothing that you need, but something quite useful and profitable for the whole world and for your neighbor. Therefore, should you see that there is a lack of hangmen, beadles, judges, lords, or princes, and find that you are qualified, you should offer your services and seek the place, that necessary government may by no means be despised and become inefficient or perish. For the world cannot and dare not dispense with it. The reason you should do this is, that in this case you would enter entirely into the service and work of others, which benefited neither yourself nor your property nor your character, but only your neighbor and others; and you would do it not to avenge yourself or to recompense evil for evil, but for the good of your neighbor and for the maintenance of the safety and peace of others. As concerns yourself, you would abide by the Gospel and govern yourself according to Christ's word, gladly turning the other cheek and letting the mantle go with the coat, when the matter concerned you and your cause. In this way, then, things are well balanced, and you satisfy at the same time God's kingdom inwardly and the kingdom of the world outwardly, at the same time suffer evil and injustice and yet punish evil and injustice, at the same time do not resist evil and yet resist it. For in the one case you consider yourself and what is yours, in the other you consider your neighbor and what is his. In what con-

cerns you and yours, you govern yourself by the Gospel and suffer injustice for yourself as a true Christian; in what concerns others and belongs to them, you govern yourself according to love and suffer no injustice for your neighbor's sake; this the Gospel does not forbid, but rather commands in another place.

Proof from the Old Testament

In this way all the saints wielded the sword from the beginning of the world: Adam and his descendants; Abraham when he rescued Lot, his brother's son, and smote the four kings, though he was a thoroughly evangelical man; Samuel, the holy prophet, slew King Agag, and Elijah the prophets of Baal. So did Moses, Joshua, the children of Israel, Samson, David, and all the kings and princes in the Old Testament. In the same way did Daniel and his associates, Ananias, Asarias and Misael, in Babylon in the same manner did Joseph in Egypt, and so on.

Should any one advance the argument, that the Old Testament is abolished and avails no more, and that therefore such examples cannot be set before Christians, I answer, That is not correct. For St. Paul says in I Corinthians 10:3, 4, "They did all eat the same spiritual meat as we, and did drink the same spiritual drink from the rock, which is Christ"; that is, they have had the same spirit and faith in Christ as we and were

Christians as well as we are. Therefore, wherein they did right, all Christians do right, from the beginning of the world unto the end. For time and external circumstances matter not among Christians. Neither is it true that the Old Testament was abolished in such a way that it need not be kept, or that it would be wrong for any one to keep it in full, as St. Jerome and many more erred in thinking. It is indeed abolished in the sense that we are free to keep it or not to keep it, and it is no longer necessary to keep it on penalty of one's soul, as was formerly the case. For Paul says in 1 Cor. 7:19; Gal. 6:15, that neither uncircumcision nor circumcision avails anything, but a new creature in Christ; that is, it is not sin to be uncircumcised, as the Jews thought, nor is it sin to be circumcised, as the heathen thought, but either is right and permissible for him who does not think he will be saved by so doing. This is true also of all other parts of the Old Testament; it is not wrong to omit them nor wrong to do them, but all is permissible and good, to do and to leave undone. Nay, if they were necessary or profitable to one's fellowman for his salvation, it would be necessary to keep them all; for every one is under obligation to do what is for his neighbor's good, whether it be Old or New Testament, Jewish or heathen, as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 12:13, for love pervades all and transcends all, considers only what is for the profit of others, and does not ask whether it is old or new.

Hence, the precedents for the use of the sword also are matters of freedom, and you may follow them or not, but where you see that your neighbor needs it, there love constrains you so that you must needs do what otherwise would be optional and unnecessary for you to do or to leave undone. Only do not suppose that you will grow pious or be saved thereby, as the Jews presumed to be saved by their works, but leave this to faith, which without works makes you a new creature.

Proof from the New Testament

To prove our position also by the New Testament, the testimony of John the Baptist in Luke 3:14, cannot be shaken on this point. It was his work to point to Christ, to witness for Him, and to teach about Him; and the teaching of the man who was to prepare a people for Christ and lead them to Him, has of necessity to be purely New Testament and evangelical. And he endorses the work of the soldiers and says they should be content with their wages. If it had been an unchristian thing to bear the sword, he ought to have censured them for it and told them to abandon both wages and sword, or he would not have taught them the Christian estate correctly. So also, when St. Peter in Acts 10 preached Christ to Cornelius, he did not tell him to abandon his work, which he would have had to do if it had prevented Cornelius from being a Christian.

Moreover, before he was baptized, the Holy Ghost came upon him. St. Luke also lauds him as a pious man previous to Peter's sermon, and does not find fault with him because he was a captain of soldiers and under a heathen emperor. What the Holy Ghost permitted to remain and did not censure in Cornelius' case, it is meet that we too should permit and not censure. A similar case is that of the Ethiopian captain, the eunuch, in Acts 8, whom Philip the evangelist converted and baptized and permitted to remain in his work and to return home again, although without bearing the sword he could not possibly have been so high an official under the queen in Ethiopia. It was the same with the governor in Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, in Acts 13:12, whom St. Paul converted, and yet permitted to remain governor among heathen and over heathen. Many holy martyrs did the same, who were obedient to heathen Roman emperors, and went under them into battle, and doubtless also slew people, for the sake of preserving peace; as is written of St. Maurice, St. Achacius, St. Gereon, and many others under the emperor Julian.

Beyond these, we have the clear, definite statement of St. Paul in Rom. 13:1, where he says, "The powers that be are ordained of God"; and again, Rom. 13:4, "The power does not bear the sword in vain, but is the minister of God for thy good, an avenger unto him that doeth evil." Be not so wicked, my friend, as to say, A Christian

may not do that which is God's peculiar work, ordinance and creation. Else you must also say, A Christian must not eat, drink or be married, for these are also God's work and ordinance. If it is God's work and creation, it is good, and so good that every one can use it in a Christian and saving way, as Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:4, "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be rejected by the believing and those who know the truth." Among "every creature of God" you must reckon not simply food and drink, clothes and shoes, but also government, citizenship, protection and administration of justice.

In short, since St. Paul here says the power is God's Rom. 13:1, servant, we must admit that it is to be exercised not only by the heathen, but by all men. What else does it mean when it is said it is God's servant except that the power is by its very nature such that one may serve God by it? Now, it should be quite unchristian to say that there is any service of God in which a Christian ought not and dare not take part, when such a service belongs to no one so much as to Christians. It would indeed be good and profitable if all princes were real and good Christians, for the sword and the government, as a special service of God, belongs of right to Christians, more than to all other men on earth. Therefore you should cherish the sword or the government, even as the state of matrimony, or husbandry, or any other handiwork which God has instituted. As a man

can serve God in the state of matrimony, in husbandry, or at a trade, for the benefit of his fellowman, and must serve Him if necessity demand; just so he can also serve God in the State and should serve Him there, if the necessities of his neighbor demand it; for the State is God's servant and workman to punish the evil and protect the good. Still it may also be omitted if there is no need for it, just as men are free not to marry and not to farm if there should be no need of marrying and farming.

You ask, Why did not Christ and the apostles bear the sword? Tell me, Why did He not also take a wife, or become a cobbler or a tailor? If an occupation or office is not good because Christ Himself did not occupy it, what would become of all occupations and offices, with the exception of the ministry which alone He exercised? Christ fulfilled His own office and vocation, but thereby did not reject any other. It was not meet that He should bear the sword, for He was to bear only that office by which His kingdom is governed and which properly serves His kingdom. Now it does not concern His kingdom that He should be a married man, a cobbler, a tailor, a farmer, a prince, a hangman or a beadle, neither is the sword or secular law of any concern, but only God's Word and Spirit, by which His people are inwardly governed. This office which He exercised then, and still exercises, always bestows God's Word and Spirit; and in this office the

apostles and all spiritual rulers must needs follow Him. For they are kept so busily employed with the spiritual sword, the Word of God, in fulfilling this their calling, that they must indeed neglect the worldly sword, and leave it to those who do not have to preach; although it is not contrary to their calling to use it, as I have said. For every one must attend to his own calling and work. Therefore, even though Christ did not bear the sword nor prescribe it, it is sufficient that He did not forbid or abolish it, but rather endorsed it; just as it is sufficient that He did not abolish the state of matrimony, but endorsed it, though He Himself took no wife and gave no commandment concerning it. He had to identify Himself throughout with the occupation and work which properly and entirely served the furtherance of His kingdom, so that no occasion and binding example might be made of it, to teach and believe that the kingdom of God cannot exist without matrimony and the sword and such externals (since Christ's examples are binding), when it is only by God's Word and Spirit that it does exist. This was and had to be Christ's peculiar work as the supreme King in this kingdom. Since, however, not all Christians have this same office, though innately it belongs to them, it is meet that they should have some other, external one, by which God may also be served.

THE MEANING OF CHRIST'S WORDS

From all this we see what is the true meaning of Christ's words in Matthew 5:39, "Resist not evil," etc. It is this, that a Christian should be so disposed that he will suffer every evil and injustice, not avenge himself nor bring suit in court, and in nothing make use of secular power and law for himself. For others, however, he may and should seek vengeance, justice, protection and help, and do what he can toward this. Likewise, the State should, either of itself or through the instigation of others, help and protect him without complaint, application or instigation on his part. When the State does not do this, he ought to permit himself to be robbed and despoiled, and not resist the evil, as Christ's words say.

Be quite certain, also, that this teaching of Christ is not a counsel of perfection, as our sophists blasphemously and falsely say, but a universal, strict command for all Christians. Then you will learn that all those who avenge themselves or go to law and wrangle in the courts over their property and honor are nothing but heathen masquerading under the name of Christians. It cannot be otherwise, I tell you. Do not look to the multitude and to the common practice, for, have no doubt, there are few Christians on earth; and God's Word is something very different from the common practice.

You see that Christ does not abolish the law

when He says, "You have heard that it was said to them of old:

"An eye for an eye; but I say unto you that ye resist not evil," etc.

But He expounds the meaning of the law as it is to be understood, as though He would say, You Jews consider it right and good before God if you recover by law what belongs to you, and you rely on what Moses said, An eye for an eye, etc. I say unto you, however, that Moses gave such a law for the wicked, who do not belong to God's kingdom, that they might not avenge themselves or do worse things, but be compelled by such outward law to desist from evil-doing, in order that by outward law and rule they might be kept under authority. But you should so conduct yourselves as not to need or invoke such a law. Although the secular authority must have such a law by which to judge unbelievers, and although you yourselves might use it to judge others, still you should not invoke or use it for yourselves and in your own affairs. You have the kingdom of heaven; therefore you should leave the kingdom of earth to any one who wants to take it.

You see, then, Christ's words do not mean that He abolishes Moses' law, or prohibits secular power, but He excepts His own. They are not to use them for themselves, but to leave them to unbelievers, whom indeed they may serve with the law. For unbelievers are not Christians; and no one can be compelled to be a Christian. But

that Christ's words apply only to His own is evident, since He afterward says they should love their enemies and be perfect like their heavenly Father. He, however, who loves his enemies lets the law alone and does not use it to demand an eye for an eye. Neither does he oppose the non-Christians who do not love their enemies and wish to use the law; nay, he lends his help that these laws may restrain the wicked from doing worse.

In this way, I take it, the word of Christ is reconciled with the passages which establish the sword, so that this is the meaning: No Christian shall wield or invoke the sword for himself and for his cause; but for another he can and ought to wield and invoke it, so that wickedness may be hindered and godliness defended. Even as the Lord says, in the same passage, Matt. 5:34, A Christian shall not swear, but let his word be Yea, yea; Nay, nay,—that is, for himself and of his own choice and desire, he should not swear. When, however, need, welfare and salvation, or God's honor demand, he should swear; thus he uses the forbidden oath to serve another, just as he uses the forbidden sword in another's service; as Christ and Paul often swore to make their teaching and testimony valuable and credible to others, as men do and have a right to do in covenants and compacts, of which Psalm 63:11, says, "They shall be praised who swear by His name."

Civil Officers in a State of Salvation

But you ask further, whether the beadles, hangmen, jurists, advocates, and their like, can also be Christians and in a state of salvation. I answer: If the State and its sword are a divine service, as was proved above, all that which the State needs in order to wield the sword must also be a divine service. There must be those who arrest, accuse, slay and destroy the wicked, and protect, acquit, defend and save the good. Therefore, when such duties are performed, not with the intention of seeking one's own ends, but only of helping to maintain the laws and the State, so that the wicked may be restrained, there is no peril in them and they may be followed like any other pursuit and be used as one's means of support. For, as 1 Cor. 13:5, was said, love of neighbor seeks not its own, considers not how great or how small, but how profitable and how needful for neighbor or community the works are.

You ask, Why may I not use the sword for myself and for my own cause, with the intention by so doing not of seeking my own interest but the punishment of evil? I answer, Such a miracle is not impossible, but quite unusual and hazardous. Where there is such affluence of the Spirit it may be done, for so we read of Samson in Judges 15:11, that he said, "I have done unto them as they did unto me"; yet, on the contrary,

Prov. 24:29, says, "Say not, I will do unto him as he has done unto me"; and Proverbs 24, "Say not thou, I will recompense evil." For Samson was called of God to harass the Philistines and deliver the children of Israel. Though he used them as an occasion to advance his own cause, still he did not do so to avenge himself or to seek his own interests, but to serve others and to punish the Philistines. No one but a real Christian and one who is full of the Spirit will follow this example. If reason also should follow this example, it would indeed pretend not to be seeking its own, but this would be untrue. It cannot be done without grace. Therefore, first become like Samson, and then you can also do as Samson did.

Part II: How Far Secular Authority Extends

We come now to the main part of this treatise. For as we have learned that there must be temporal authority on earth, and how it is to be employed in a Christian and salutary way, we must now learn how far its arm extends and how far its hand reaches, lest it extend too far and encroach upon God's kingdom and rule. And it is very necessary to know this, since where it is given too wide a scope, intolerable and terrible injury follows; and, on the other hand, it cannot be too much restricted without working injury. In the latter case the punishment is too light; in the former, too severe. It is more tolerable, however, to err on the latter side and punish too little; since it always is better to let a knave live than to kill a good man, for the world will still have knaves, and must have them, but of good men there are few.

In the first place, it must be noted that the two classes of Adam's children, the one in God's kingdom under Christ, the other in the kingdom of the world under the State, have two kinds of laws, as was said above. Every kingdom must have its own laws and regulations, and without law no kingdom or government can exist, as daily experience sufficiently proves. Worldly government has laws which extend no farther than to life and property and what is external upon earth. For over the soul God

SECULAR AUTHORITY DOES NOT EXTEND TO THE SOUL

can and will let no one rule but Himself. Therefore where temporal power presumes to prescribe laws for the soul, it encroaches upon God's government and only misleads and destroys the souls. We desire to make this so clear that every one shall grasp it, and that our junkers, the princes and bishops, may see what fools they are when they seek to coerce the people with their laws and commandments into believing one thing or another.

When a man-made law is imposed upon the soul, in order to make it believe this or that, as that man prescribes, there is certainly no word of God for it. If there is no word of God for it, it is uncertain whether God will have it so, for we cannot be certain that what He does not com-

mand pleases Him. Nay, we are sure that it does not please Him, for He desires that our faith be grounded simply and entirely on His divine Word, as He says in Matthew 16:18, "On this rock will I build my church"; and in John 10:27, "My sheep hear my voice and know me; but the voice of strangers they hear not, but flee from them." It follows from this that the secular power forces souls to eternal death with such an outrageous law, for it compels them to believe as right and certainly pleasing to God what is nevertheless uncertain, nay, what is certainly displeasing to Him, since there is no clear word of God for it. For whoever believes that to be right which is wrong or uncertain denies the truth, which is God Himself, and believes in lies and errors and counts that right which is wrong. Hence it is the height of folly when they command that one shall believe the Church, the fathers, the councils, though there be no word of God for it. The devil's apostles command such things, not the Church; for the Church commands nothing unless it is sure it is God's Word, as St. Peter says, "If any man speak let him speak as the oracles of God." It will be a very long time, however, before they prove that the statements of the councils are God's Word. Still more foolish is it when they assert that kings and princes and the mass of men believe thus and so. If you please, we are not baptized unto kings, princes, or even unto the mass of men, but unto Christ and unto God Himself;

neither are we called kings, princes or common folk, but Christians. No one shall and can command the soul, unless he can show it the way to heaven; but this no man can do, only God. Therefore in matters which concern the salvation of souls nothing but God's Word shall be taught and accepted.

Again, consummate fools though they are, they must confess that they have no power over souls. For no human being can kill a soul or make it alive, conduct it to heaven or hell. And if they will not believe us in this, Christ indeed will certify strongly enough to it, since He says in Matthew 10:28, "Fear not them which kill the body and after that have power to do naught; but rather fear Him Who after He has killed the body has power to condemn to hell." I consider that here it is sufficiently clear that the soul is taken out of all human hands and is placed under the power of God alone. Now tell me, how much wit is there in the head of him who imposes commandments where he has no power at all? Who would not regard one as insane if he commanded the moon to shine when he desired it? How fitting it would be if the Leipziger would impose laws on us Wittenbergers, or again, if we in Wittenberg would lay laws on those in Leipzig. They would certainly send the law-makers a thank-offering of hellebore to clear the brain and cure the sniffles. Nevertheless, our emperors and wise princes continue to permit pope, bishops and

sophists to lead them on, one blind man leading the other, to command their subjects to believe, without God's Word, whatever they please, and still would be known as Christian princes. God help us!

Besides, we can understand how any authority shall and may act only where it can see, know, judge, change and convert. For what kind of judge would he be who should blindly judge matters which he neither heard nor saw? Tell me, how can a man see, know, judge, condemn and change hearts? This is reserved for God alone, as Ps. 7:9, says, "God trieth the heart and reins"; likewise, Acts 15:8, "The Lord shall judge the people"; and Acts 15, "God knoweth the hearts"; and, Jer. 17:9, "Wicked and unsearchable is the human heart; who can know it? I the Lord, who search the heart and reins." A court ought and must be quite certain and clear about everything, if it is to pass sentence. But the thoughts and intents of the heart can be known to no one but God; therefore it is useless and impossible to command or compel any one by force to believe one thing or another. It must be taken hold of in a different way; force cannot accomplish it. And I am surprised at the great fools, since they themselves all say, *De occultis non judicat ecclesia*,—the Church does not judge secret things. If the spiritual rule of the Church governs only public matters, how dare the senseless secular power judge and control such a secret, spiritual, hidden matter as faith?

Furthermore, every man is responsible for his own faith, and he must see to it for himself that he believes rightly. As little as another can go to hell or heaven for me, so little can he believe or disbelieve for me; and as little as he can open or shut heaven or hell for me, so little can he drive me to faith or unbelief. Since, then, belief or unbelief is a matter of every one's conscience, and since this is no lessening of the secular power, the latter should be content and attend to its own affairs and permit men to believe one thing or another, as they are able and willing, and constrain no one by force. For faith is a free work, to which no one can be forced. Nay, it is a divine work, done in the Spirit, certainly not a matter which outward authority should compel or create. Hence arises the well-known saying, found also in Augustine, "No one can or ought be constrained to believe."

Besides, the blind, wretched folk do not see how utterly hopeless and impossible a thing they are attempting. For no matter how much they fret and fume, they cannot do more than make the people obey them by word and deed; the heart they cannot constrain, though they wear themselves out trying. For the proverb is true, "Thoughts are free." Why then would they constrain people to believe from the heart, when they see that it is impossible? In this way they compel weak consciences to lie, to deny, and to say what they do not believe in their hearts, and they load

themselves down with dreadful alien sins. For all the lies and false confessions which such weak consciences utter fall back upon him who compels them. It were far better, if their subjects erred, simply to let them err, than that they should constrain them to lie and to say what is not in their hearts; neither is it right to defend evil with what is worse.

Would you like to know why God ordains that the temporal princes must offend so frightfully? I will tell you. God has given them over to a perverse mind and will make an end of them, as well as of the spiritual nobles. For my ungracious lords, the pope and the bishops, should be bishops and preach God's Word; this they leave undone and are become temporal princes, and govern with laws which concern only life and property. How thoroughly they have turned things upside down! Inwardly they ought to be ruling souls by God's Word; hence outwardly they rule castles, cities, land and people and torture souls with unspeakable outrages. Similarly, the temporal lords should rule land and people outwardly; this they do not do. All they can do is to flay and scrape, put tax on tax, tribute on tribute, let loose now a bear, now a wolf. Besides this, there is no justice, fidelity or truth to be found among them; what they do would be beneath robbers and knaves, and their temporal rule has sunk quite as low as that of the spiritual tyrants. Hence God also perverts their minds, that they

rush on in their senselessness and would establish a spiritual rule over souls, as the others would establish a temporal rule, in order that they may contentedly burden themselves with alien sins, and with God's and all men's hate, until they go under with bishops, priests and monks, one knave with the other. Then they lay all the blame on the Gospel, and instead of doing penance, blaspheme God and say that our preaching has brought about what their perverse wickedness has merited and still unceasingly merits, as the Romans did when they were destroyed. 1 Here then you have God's decree regarding the high and mighty. But they are not to believe it, lest this severe decree of God be hindered by their repentance.

THE MEANING OF PAUL'S AND PETER'S WORDS

You reply, But Paul said in Romans 13, "Every soul shall be subject to power and authority," and Peter says, "We should be subject to every ordinance of man." I answer, That is just what I want! These sayings are in my favor. St. Paul speaks of authority and power. Now, Rom. 13:1, you have just heard that no one but God can have authority over souls. Hence Paul cannot be speaking of any obedience except where there can be corresponding authority. From this it follows that he does not speak of faith, and does not say that sec-

ular authority should have the right to command faith, but he is speaking of external goods, and that these are to be set in order and controlled on earth. This his words also clearly indicate, when he prescribes the limits to both authority and obedience, and says, "Render to every one his dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom; honor to whom honor; fear to whom fear." You see, temporal obedience and power apply only externally to tribute, custom, honor and fear. Likewise when he says, "The power is not a terror to good, but to evil works," he again limits the power, so that it is to have the mastery not over faith or the Word of God, but over evil works.

This is what St. Peter also desires, when he says, "Ordinance of man." Human ordinance cannot possibly extend its authority to heaven and over souls, but belongs only to earth, to the external intercourse of men with each other, where men can see, know, judge, sentence, punish and acquit. Christ Himself made this nice distinction and summed it all up briefly when He said, "Give unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." If, then, imperial power extended to God's kingdom and power, and were not something by itself, He would not thus have made it a separate thing. For, as was said, the soul is not under Caesar's power; he can neither teach nor guide it, neither kill it nor make it alive, neither bind it nor loose it, nei-

ther judge it nor condemn it, neither hold it nor release it, which he must do had he power to command it and impose laws upon it; but over life, goods and honor he indeed has this right, for such things are under his authority. David, too, stated this long ago in one of his short sayings when he says in Ps. 115:16, "The heavens hath he given to the Lord of heaven; but the earth hath he given to the children of men." That is, over what is on earth and belongs to the temporal, earthly kingdom, man has authority from God, but that which belongs to the heavenly eternal kingdom is entirely under the heavenly Lord. Nor does Moses forget this when he says in Gen. 1:26, "God said, Let us make man to rule over the beasts of the earth, over the fish in the waters, over the birds in the air." There only external rule is ascribed to men.

And, in short, this is the meaning, as St. Peter says, Acts 5:29, "We must obey God rather than men." Thereby he clearly sets a limit to worldly government, for if we had to do all that worldly government demands it would be to no purpose to say, "We must obey God rather than men."

The Christian and the New Testament

If then your prince or temporal lord commands you to hold with the pope, to believe this or that, or commands you to give up certain books, you

should say, It does not befit Lucifer to sit by the side of God. Dear Lord, I owe you obedience with life and goods; command me within the limits of your power on earth, and I will obey. But if you command me to believe, and to put away books, I will not obey; for in this case you are a tyrant and overreach yourself, and command where you have neither right nor power, etc. Should he take your property for this, and punish such disobedience blessed are you. Thank God that you are worthy to suffer for the sake of the divine Word, and let him rave, fool that he is. He will meet his judge. For I tell you, if you do not resist him but give him his way, and let him take your faith or your books, you have really denied God.

Let me illustrate. In Meissen, Bavaria, in the Mark, and other places, the tyrants have issued an order that the New Testaments be delivered to the courts everywhere. In this case their subjects ought not deliver a page or a letter, at risk of their salvation. For whoever does so, delivers Christ into Herod's hands, since they act as murderers of Christ, like Herod. But if their houses are ordered searched and books or goods taken by force, they should suffer it to be done. Outrage is not to be resisted, but endured, yet they should not sanction it, nor serve or obey or follow by moving foot or finger. For such tyrants act as worldly princes should act,—"worldly" princes they are; but the world is God's enemy. Therefore they

must also do what is opposed to God, and in accord with the world, that they may by no means lose all honor, but remain worldly princes. Hence do not wonder that they rage and mock at the Gospel; they must live up to their name and title.

You must know that from the beginning of the world a wise prince is a rare bird indeed; still more so a pious prince. They are usually the greatest fools or the worst knaves on earth; therefore one must constantly expect the worst from them and look for little good from them, especially in divine matters, which concern the salvation of souls. They are God's jailers and hangmen, and His divine wrath needs them to punish the wicked and preserve outward peace. Our God is a great Lord, and therefore must have such noble, honorable and rich hangmen and beadles, and desires that they shall have riches, honor and fear, in full and plenty, from every one. It pleases His divine will that we call His hangmen gracious lords, fall at their feet and be subject to them in all humility, so long as they do not ply their trade too far and desire to become shepherds instead of hangmen. If a prince becomes wise, pious or a Christian, it is one of the great wonders, and one of the most precious tokens of divine grace upon that land. For the usual course is according to the saying in Isa. 3:4, "I will give children to be their princes and babes shall rule over them," and in Hosea 13:11, "I will give thee a king in my anger and take him away in my

wrath." The world is too wicked, and does not deserve to have many wise and pious princes. Frogs need storks.

Again you say, Temporal power does not force men to believe, but simply prevents them from being misled by

The Suppression of Heresy

false doctrine; otherwise how could heretics be prevented from preaching? I answer, This the bishops should do, to whom, and not to the princes, such duty is entrusted. Heresy can never be prevented by force. That must be taken hold of in a different way, and must be opposed and dealt with otherwise than with the sword. Here God's Word must strive; if that does not accomplish the end it will remain unaccomplished through secular power, though it fill the world with blood. Heresy is a spiritual matter, which no iron can strike, no fire burn, no water drown. God's Word alone avails here, as Paul says, 2 Cor. 10:4, 5, "Our weapons are not carnal, but mighty through God to destroy every counsel and high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Moreover, faith and heresy are never so strong as when men oppose them by sheer force, without God's Word. For men count it certain that such force is for a wrong cause and is di-

rected against the right, since it proceeds without God's Word, and does not know how to further its cause except by force, just as the brute beasts do. For even in secular affairs force can be used only after the wrong has been legally condemned. How much less possible is it to act with force, without justice and God's Word, in these high, spiritual matters! See, therefore, what fine, shrewd nobles they are. They would drive out heresy, and set about it in such a way that they only strengthen the opposition, make themselves suspected, and justify the heretics. Friend, would you drive out heresy, then you must find a plan to tear it first of all from the heart and altogether to turn men's wills away from it; force will not accomplish this, but only strengthen the heresy. What avails it to strengthen heresy in the heart and to weaken only its outward expression, and to force the tongue to lie? God's Word, however, enlightens the hearts; and so all heresies and errors perish of themselves from the heart.

Such overpowering of heresy the prophet Isaiah, proclaimed in his eleventh chapter when he said, "He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and slay the wicked with the breath of His lips." You see, if the wicked is to be smitten and converted, it is accomplished by the mouth. In short, such princes and tyrants do not know that to fight against heresy is to fight against the devil, who fills men's hearts with error, as Paul says in Ephesians 6:12, "We fight not with flesh

and blood, but with spiritual wickedness, with the rulers of the darkness of this world." Therefore, as long as the devil is not repelled and driven from the heart, it matters as little to him that I destroy his vessels with fire or sword, as it would if I fought lightning with a straw. Job bore abundant witness to this, Job 41:21, when in his forty-first chapter he said that the devil esteemeth iron as straw and fears no power on earth. We learn it also from experience, for although all the Jews and heretics were burned, yet no one has been or will be convinced and converted thereby.

Nevertheless such a world as this deserves such princes, none of whom do their duty. The bishops are to leave the Word of God alone and not rule souls by it, but command the worldly princes to rule them with the sword. The worldly princes, in their turn, are to permit usury, theft, adultery, murder, and other evil works, and themselves do them; and then allow the bishops to punish with the ban. Thus they turn things topsy-turvy, and rule souls with iron and the body with bans, so that worldly princes rule in a spiritual, and spiritual princes in a worldly way. What else does the devil have to do on earth than thus to play the fool and hold carnival with his folk? These are our Christian princes, who defend the faith and devour the Turk. Fine fellows, to be sure, whom we may well trust to accomplish something by such refined wisdom, namely, break their necks and plunge land and people

into suffering and want. I would, however, in all fidelity advise the blinded folk to take heed to the short saying in Ps. 107:40, *"Effundit contemptum super principes."*

I swear unto you by God that, if through your fault this little text becomes effective against you, you are lost, though every one of you be as mighty as the Turk; and your snorting and raving will help you nothing. A large part has already come true. For there are very few princes that are not reckoned fools or knaves. That is because they show themselves to be such; the common man is learning to think, and the prince's scourge, which God calls contemptum, is gathering force among the mob and with the common man. I fear there is no way to stop it, unless the princes conduct themselves in a princely manner and begin again to rule reasonably and thoroughly. Men ought not, men cannot, men will not suffer your tyranny and presumption much longer. Dear princes and lords, be wise and guide yourselves accordingly. God will no longer tolerate it. The world is no longer what it was when you hunted and drove the people like so much game. Therefore drop your outrage and force, and remember to deal justly and let God's Word have its course, as it will and must and shall, nor will you prevent it. If there is heresy abroad, let it be overcome, as is proper, with God's Word. But if you will keep on brandishing the sword, take heed lest there come

one who shall bid you sheath it, and that not in God's name.

But should you ask, Since there is to be no secular sword among Christians, how are they to be ruled outwardly? There certainly must be authority also among Christians. I answer, Among Christians there shall and can be no authority; but all are alike subject to one another, as Paul says "Each shall count the other his superior," and Peter in 1 Peter 5, "All of you be subject one to another." This is also what Christ means in Luke 14:10, "When you are bidden to a wedding, sit down in the lowest room."

There is no superior among Christians, but Christ Himself and Christ alone. And what kind of authority can there be where all are equal and have the same right, power, possession, and honor, and no one desires to be the other's superior, but each the other's inferior? One could not establish authority where there are such people, even if one would, since their character and nature will not permit them to have superiors, for no one is willing or able to be the superior. But where there are no such people, there are no real Christians.

Priests and Bishops, Servants

What, then, are the priests and bishops? I answer, Their government is not one of authority or power, but a service and an office; for they are

neither higher nor better than other Christians. Therefore they should not impose any law or decree on others without their will and consent; their rule consists in nothing else than in dealing with God's Word, leading Christians by it and overcoming heresy by its means. For, as was said, Christians can be ruled by nothing but by God's Word. For Christians must be ruled in faith, not by outward works. Faith, however, can come through no word of man, but only through the Word of God, as Paul says in Rom. 10:17, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Those who do not believe are not Christians, do not belong to Christ's kingdom, but to the worldly kingdom, and are constrained and ruled by the sword and by outward rule. Christians do of themselves, without constraint, every good thing, and find God's Word alone sufficient for them. Of this, however, I have written frequently and at length elsewhere.

PART III: THE PRINCE'S DUTY TO SERVE

Now that we know the limits of secular authority, it is time also to inquire how a prince should use it; for the sake of those who fain would be Christian princes and lords, and desire to enter the life beyond, of whom there are very few. For Christ Himself describes the nature of temporal princes in Luke 22:25, when he says, "The worldly princes exercise lordship, and they that are chief exercise authority." For if they are born princes or chosen to office, they think only that it is their right to be served and to rule with power. He who would be a Christian prince certainly must lay aside the intention to rule and to use force. For cursed and condemned is every kind of life lived and sought for selfish profit and good; cursed are all works not done in love. But they are done in love when they are directed with all one's heart, not toward

selfish pleasure, profit, honor, ease and salvation, but toward the profit, honor and salvation of others.

I will say nothing here of secular affairs and of the laws of government, for that is a large subject and there are too many law-books already; although, if a prince himself is not wiser than his jurists, and does not know more than is in the law-books, he will surely rule according to the saying in Proverbs 28:16, "A prince that wanteth understanding will oppress many with injustice." No matter how good and equitable the laws are, they all make exceptions of cases of necessity, in which they cannot be enforced. Therefore a prince must have the law in hand as firmly as the sword and decide in his own mind when and where the law must be applied strictly or with moderation, so that reason may always control all law and be the highest law and rule over all laws. A housefather who, although he appoints a definite time and amount of work and food for his servants and children, must yet reserve the power to change or omit such regulations if his servants happen to be sick, imprisoned, detained, deceived, or otherwise hindered, and not deal as severely with the sick as with the well. I say this in order that men may not think it sufficient and an excellent thing if they follow the written law or the legal advisers; more than that is required.

What should a prince do, if he is not sufficiently wise, and must follow the directions of

jurists and law books? I answer, For this reason I said that the position of a prince is a perilous one, and if he is not wise enough to master both the law and his advisers, the saying of Solomon is fulfilled Eccl. 10:16, "Woe to the land whose king is a child." Solomon recognized this; therefore he despaired of all law, even of that which Moses, through God, had prescribed for Him and of all his princes and counselors, and turned to God Himself and prayed to Him for a wise heart to rule the people. A prince must follow this example and proceed with fear; he must depend neither upon dead books nor upon living heads, but cling solely to God, pray without ceasing to Him, and ask for a right understanding, above all books and masters, wisely to rule his subjects. Therefore I know of no law to prescribe for a prince, but will simply instruct him what the attitude of his heart and mind ought to be with respect to all laws, counsels, decisions and actions, so that if he govern himself thereby God will surely grant him the power to carry out all laws, counsels, and actions in a proper and godly way.

I. He must consider his subjects and rightly dispose his heart toward them in this matter. He does this if he applies his whole mind to making himself useful and serviceable to them, and does not think, "Land and people are mine; I will do as I please"; but thus, "I belong to land and people; I must do what is profitable and good for them. My concern must be, not how I may rule and be

haughty, but how they may be protected and defended by a good peace." And he should picture Christ to himself, and say, "Behold, Christ the chief Ruler came and served me, sought not to have power, profit and honor from me, but only considered my need, and did all He could that I might have power, profit and honor from Him and through Him. I will do the same, not seek mine own advantage in my subjects, but their advantage, and thus serve them by my office, protect them, give them audience and support, that they, and not I, may have the benefit and profit by it." Thus a prince should in his heart empty himself of his power and authority, and interest himself in the need of his subjects, dealing with it as though it were his own need. Thus Christ did unto us; and these are the proper works of Christian love.

You say, Who then would be a prince? For that would make the position of a prince the worst on earth, full of trouble, labor and sorrow. Where would there be room for the princely pleasures, such as dancing, hunting, racing, gaming, and similar worldly enjoyments? I answer, We are not prescribing now how a temporal prince shall live, but how a temporal prince shall be a Christian, in order that he also may reach heaven. Who does not know that a prince is a rare bird in heaven? I do not speak because I have any hope that princes will give heed, but because there might possibly be one of them who would fain be

a Christian and would like to know what he ought to do. For I am sure that God's Word will neither turn nor bend to princes; but the princes must bend themselves according to it. It is enough for me to point out that it is not impossible for a prince to be a Christian, though it is a rare thing and surrounded with difficulties. If they would so manage that their dancing, hunting and racing were done without injury to their subjects, and if they would otherwise conduct their office in love toward them, God would not be so hard as to begrudge them their dancing, hunting and racing. But it would follow of itself that, if they served and cared for their subjects as their office requires, full many a fine dance, hunt, race and game would have to be abandoned.

II. Counselors Not to Be Trusted

He must beware of the high and mighty and of his counselors, and so conduct himself toward them that he despise none, and trust none enough to leave everything to him. For God cannot tolerate either. He once spake by an ass; therefore no man is to be despised, no matter how humble he be. On the other hand, He permitted the highest angel to fall from heaven; therefore no man is to be trusted, no matter how

wise, holy and great he is, but one must give a hearing to all and wait to see through which one of them God will speak and act. For the greatest harm done at court is when a prince enslaves his mind to the high and mighty and to the flatterers, and does not look into things himself; since, when a prince fails and plays the fool, not only one person is affected, but land and people must bear the result of such foolishness. Therefore a prince should bestow only so much trust and power upon his rulers that he will still keep the reins of government in his own hand. He must keep his eyes open and give attention, and, like Jehoshaphat, ride through the land and observe everywhere how the government and the law is administered. In this way he will learn for himself that one must not implicitly trust any man. For you have no right to think that another will interest himself in you and in your land so deeply as you yourself, unless he be filled with the Spirit and be a good Christian. The natural man does not do it. Since, however, you do not know whether he is a Christian or how long he will remain one, you cannot safely depend on him.

Beware especially of those who say, "Gracious lord, why does your grace not trust me more? Who is so willing to serve your grace," etc.? Such a one is certainly not guileless, but desires to be lord in the country and make a jackanapes of you. If he were a true and pious Christian he would be quite willing that you should entrust him with

nothing, and would praise you for keeping so careful a watch on him; for he acts in accordance with God's will and therefore he is willing, and can bear it, to have his acts brought to the light by you or any one else, as Christ says in John 3:21, "He that doeth well cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, for they are wrought in God." The former, however, would blind your eyes, and act under cover of darkness, as Christ also says in the same place, John 3:20, "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, lest his deeds should be punished." Therefore, beware of him. And if he complain of it, say, "Friend, I do thee no wrong; God is not willing that I trust myself or any other man; find fault with Him, then, because He will have it so, or that He has not made you more than human; although, even if you were an angel, since Lucifer indeed was not to be trusted, I would not trust you completely, for we should trust God alone."

Let no prince think that he shall fare better than David, who is an example to all princes. He had so wise a counselor, named Ahithophel, that the text says, 2 Sam. 16:23, "The counsel which Ahithophel counseled availed as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God." Nevertheless he fell, and sank so low that he sought to betray, kill and destroy David his own lord. Then David had to learn that no 2 Sam. 17:1. man is to be trusted. Why do you suppose God permitted such a horrible example to occur, and to be recorded, if not

in order to warn the princes and lords against the most perilous misfortune that may befall them, so that they might trust no one. For it is most deplorable when flatterers reign at court, or when the prince depends on others, puts himself in their hands, and lets every one do as he will.

You say, perchance, If no one is to be trusted, how will one rule land and people? I answer, You should entrust and take the venture, but you should not trust and depend save on God alone. You must certainly entrust the offices to some one and take a chance with him; but you should not trust him otherwise than as one who may fail you and whom you must watch with unfailing vigilance; as a driver has confidence in the horses and wagon he drives, yet does not let them go their own way, but holds reins and lash in his hand and does not sleep. Remember the old proverbs, which are the sure fruits of experience: "A careful master makes a good horse," and "The master's footsteps make a fruitful field,"—that is, if the master does not look after things himself, but depends upon counselors and servants, things never go right. God also will have it so, and causes it to happen, in order that the lords may be driven of necessity to fulfill their office themselves, as everyone must fulfill his calling and every creature do its work; otherwise the lords will become fatted pigs and a worthless lot, of no profit to any one but themselves.

III. Punishing Evil Doers

He must take heed that he deal justly with evil doers. Here he must be very wise and prudent to mete out punishment without injuring others. I know no better example of this than David again. He had a captain, Joab by name, who played two wicked pranks in that he treacherously murdered two loyal captains, whereby he justly merited death twice over; yet David did not put him to death during his lifetime, but commanded his son Solomon without fail to do so, because he could not punish him without great injury and disturbance. A prince must punish the wicked in such a way that he does not step on the dish while picking up the spoon, and for the sake of one man's head plunge land and people into want and fill the land with widows and orphans.

Therefore he must not obey the counselors and fire-eaters who incite and provoke him to begin war and say, "What, must we suffer such insults and injustice?" He is a poor Christian indeed who for the sake of a single castle would make an armed camp of the whole land. In brief, here one must hold by the proverb, "He cannot rule who cannot wink at faults." Let this, therefore, be his rule: Where wrong cannot be punished without greater wrong, there let him waive his rights, however just. He must not regard his

own injury, but the wrong which others must suffer as a consequence of the penalty he imposes. For what have the many women and children done that they should be made widows and orphans in order that you may avenge yourself on an idle tongue or a wicked hand which has injured you?

You ask, But shall not a prince go to war, nor his subjects follow him into battle? I answer, That is a far-reaching question, but let me answer it very briefly. To act here as a Christian, I say, a prince should not wage war against his overlord —the king, emperor or other liege—but should let him who takes take. For one must not resist the government with force, but only with knowledge of the truth; if it is influenced by it, well; if not, you are innocent, and suffer wrong for God's sake. But if your opponent is your equal, your inferior, or of a foreign government, you should first offer him justice and peace, as Moses taught the children of Israel. If he is unwilling, then use your best strategy and defend yourself by force against force, as Moses well describes it all in Deuteronomy 20:10. In doing this you must not consider your own interests and how you may remain lord, but your subjects, to whom you owe help and protection, that all may be done in love. For, since your entire land is in peril, you must make the venture so that with God's help all may not be lost; and if you cannot prevent some from becoming widows and orphans, as a consequence

of this, you must nevertheless prevent it that all go to ruin and there be nothing left but widows and orphans.

In this matter subjects are in duty bound to follow and risk life and property for the cause. For in such a case one must risk his property and himself for the sake of the other. And in such a war it is a Christian act and an act of love confidently to kill, rob, and pillage the enemy, and to do everything that can injure him until one has conquered him according to the methods of war. Only, one must beware of sin, not violate wives and virgins, and when victory comes, offer mercy and peace to those who surrender and humble themselves. Therefore in such a case let the saying hold true, "God helps those who help themselves." So Abraham did when he smote the four kings, as Genesis 14 tells us, when he certainly caused great slaughter and showed little mercy until he conquered them. Such happenings must be considered as sent of God, that He may now and then cleanse the land and drive out the knaves.

But when a prince is in the wrong, are his people bound to follow him then too? I answer, No, for it is no one's duty to do wrong; we ought to obey God Who desires the right, rather than men. How is it, when the subjects do not know whether the prince is in the right or not? I answer, As long as they cannot know, nor find out by any possible means, they may obey without

peril to their souls. For in such a case one must apply the law of Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:12. Moses, when he writes in Exodus 21 that a murderer who has unknowingly and involuntarily killed a man shall be delivered by fleeing to a city of refuge and by the judgment of the congregation. For whichever side is defeated, whether it be in the right or in the wrong, must accept it as a punishment from God; but whichever side wars and wins, in such ignorance, must regard their battle as though one fell from the roof and killed another, and leave the matter to God. For it is the same to God whether He deprives you of goods and life by a just lord or by an unjust. You are His creature, and He can do with you as He will—if only your conscience is clear. God Himself thus excuses Abimelech in Genesis 20, when he took Abraham's wife, not because he had done right, but because he had not known that she was Abraham's wife.

IV. A prince must act also in a Christian way toward his God, that is, he must subject himself to Him in entire confidence and pray for wisdom to rule well, as Solomon did. But of faith and trust in God I have written so much elsewhere that it is not necessary to say more here. Therefore we will close by saying briefly that a prince's duty is fourfold: First, that toward God consists in true confidence and in sincere prayer; second, that toward his subjects consists in love and Christian service; third, that toward his coun-

selors and rulers consists in an open mind and unfettered judgment; fourth, that toward evil doers consists in proper zeal and firmness. Then his state is right, outwardly and inwardly, pleasing to God and to the people. But he must expect much envy and sorrow,—the cross will soon rest on the shoulders of such a ruler.

The Restitution and the Law of Love

Finally, in addition, I must make answer to those who dispute about restitution, that is, about the returning of goods unlawfully acquired. This is a common task of the temporal sword, and much has been written concerning it, and there has been much hairsplitting in the discussion of it. I will put it all in a few words, and dispose at one and the same time of all these laws and the quibbles that follow. No more definite law can be found on this subject than the law of love. In the first place, when such a case is brought before you, in which one is to make restitution to another, the matter is soon settled if they are both Christians; for neither will withhold what belongs to the other, nor will either of them demand that it be returned. If only one is a Christian, namely, the one to whom restitution is to be made, it is again easy to settle, for he does not care whether it never be returned. The same is true if the one who is to make restitution is a

Christian; he will do so. But whether one is a Christian or not a Christian, you must decide the restitution as follows. If the debtor is poor and unable to make restitution, and the other party is not poor, then you should let the law of love prevail and acquit the debtor.

For, according to the law of love, the other party, too, owes it to him to relinquish the debt, and if necessary to give him something besides. But if the debtor is not poor, then let him restore as much as he can, all, half, a third, or a fourth of it, provided that you leave him enough to assure a house, food and clothing for himself, his wife and children; for this you would owe him if you could give it, much less ought you to take it away now, since you do not need it and he cannot do without it.

But if neither is a Christian, or if either is unwilling to be judged by the law of love, you may ask them to call in another judge, and announce to them that they are acting against God and the law of nature, even though they may obtain absolute justice through human law. For nature, like love, teaches that I should do as I would be done by. Therefore I cannot strip any one else, even if I have the very best right to do so, if I myself am not willing to be stripped of my goods, but as I would that another should relinquish his right to me in such an instance, even so should I also relinquish my rights. Thus one should deal with all property unlawfully held, whether in public or

private, that love and the law of nature may always prevail. For when you judge according to love, you will easily decide and adjust matters without any law-books. But when you ignore love and natural law, you will never succeed in pleasing God, though you have devoured all the law-books and jurists; they will only cause you to err, the more you depend on them. A good and just decision must not and cannot be given out of books, but must come from a free mind, as though there were not a single book. Such a free decision, however, is given by love and by the law of nature, of which the reason is full; but out of the books come rigid and vague judgments. Of this I will give you an example.

An incident of this sort is told of Duke Charles of Burgundy. A certain nobleman took an enemy prisoner, whereupon the prisoner's wife came to redeem her husband. The nobleman promised to give her back her husband provided she would lie with him. The woman was virtuous, yet desired to set her husband free; so she goes and asks her husband whether she shall do this thing in order to set him free. The husband desired to be set free and to save his life, and gives his wife permission. After the nobleman had lain with the wife, he had the husband beheaded the next day and gave him to her a corpse. She laid the whole case before Duke Charles, who summoned the nobleman and commanded him to marry the woman. When the wedding day was

over, he had the man beheaded, put the woman in possession of his property, and raised her again to honor. Thus he punished the crime in a princely way.

You see, such a decision no pope, nor jurist, and no law-book could have given him; but it sprang from untrammeled reason, above the law in the books, and is so excellent that every one must approve of it and find the justice of it written in his own heart. St. Augustine in his Sermon of the Lord on the Mount writes in the same fashion. Therefore we should keep written laws subject to reason, whence indeed they have welled as from the spring of justice, and not make the spring dependent on its rivulets, nor take reason captive to the letter.

FINIS.

About the Publisher

Apocalypse Press

Visit our website:
www.Apocalypse.Press

We have a line of mostly republished books from Christian past, a few of our own, and we hope to continue this series of readers editions.

If this book meant something to you, please:

- leave us a review on Amazon
- send an email: nate@jesuspeoplesf.com
- subscribe to our YouTube Channel (youttube.com/JesusPeopleSF)
- Donate (we are a 501c3 nonprofit): www.apocalypse.press/donate

Thanks,
The Publishers.